



ISLAND COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

Department of Natural Resources

PO Box 5000

Coupeville, WA 98239

To: Island County Board of Commissioners
Conservation Futures Citizen Advisory Board

From: Island County Department of Natural Resources

Re: 2022 Conservation Futures Funding Applications– DNR Evaluation

Date: April 4, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate the 2022 applications for Island County Conservation Futures Funding. This document details how the Island County Department of Natural Resources (IC DNR) staff evaluated the Habitat and Water Resources sections of the Acquisition Project Technical Evaluation Criteria. The information in this memo is intended to provide technical guidance to the CFF Citizen’s Advisory Board (CAB) on the habitat section of the CFF scoring. The following Island County Department of Natural Resources (IC DNR) staff evaluated the 2022 Conservation Futures Funding Applications:

Jennifer Johnson, Natural Resource Manager

Clea Barenburg, Watershed Planner

Alexandra Plumb, Lead Entity Program Coordinator

The IC DNR staff evaluated these proposed projects using the following Acquisition Project Technical Evaluation criteria:

A. Habitat <i>(Evaluated by Island County Natural Resources)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Biological function and environmental benefits, quality and importance of habitat type for specific species including salmonids.2. Connectivity to and enhancement of other protected lands and important water bodies.3. Site significance of habitat ecosystem: locally, regionally, or statewide.
B. Water resources <i>(Evaluated by Island County Natural Resources)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provides for protection of groundwater resources through aquifer recharge area protection. Groundwater susceptibility is currently mapped as Low, Medium or High susceptibility (as part of the county’s CAO).2. Provides for protection of groundwater resources / seawater intrusion risk (ICC 8.09.099).3. Reduces impact of surface water discharge.

ENGLISH BOOM CFF ACQUISITION REVIEW

A. Habitat

1. Biological function and environmental benefits, quality and importance of habitat type for specific species including salmonids.

It is a steeply sloping parcel that consists of a mature, mixed forest canopy of coniferous and deciduous trees and a native shrub layer. The forest on the parcel plays an important role for carbon sequestration, of which the benefits will be maximized as the forest continues to mature.

Pocket estuaries within one mile of the mouth of the Skagit River are particularly important for juvenile Chinook salmonids. Functioning, high-quality habitat at English Boom Park is important for Chinook salmon, a federally threatened species. The eelgrass beds of the Saratoga Passage Marine Stewardship Area surrounding the Park offer habitat for forage fish that salmon and federally endangered Orca whales feed on when they travel through the area every summer.

Wetlands (Delta Estuary) are adjacent to the parcel. These ecosystems are considered fragile ecosystems that may serve important and beneficial functions such as assistance in reducing flooding, erosion, siltation, and ground and surface water pollution; helping maintain ground water recharge and surface water flows; and providing wildlife, plant, and fisheries habitats. Wetlands harbor plant and animal species with recreational, economic, and cultural importance.

This is a potential opportunity to connect to an existing preserved park area with important delta estuary and shellfish beds. These connections can create valuable expanded wildlife corridors by connecting large, protected habitat areas and providing increased areas to breed and find refuge, shelter, and access to food and water. The movement, migration, and dispersal of plants and animals that results from having protected corridors also increase genetic diversity amongst species.

2. Connectivity to and enhancement of other protected lands and important water bodies.

This area is listed in the Island County Comprehensive plan as Habitat Conservation Priorities for Parks Acquisition. Acquiring this property in its current state and incorporating it into English Boom Park will help protect water quality, manage the quantity of waters draining into the estuary, and maintain intact forest habitat. Maintaining the ecological integrity of the bays and sloughs is closely tied to protecting the adjacent uplands.

3. Site significance of habitat ecosystem: locally, regionally, or statewide.

English Boom Park and the proposed addition also lie within the Skagit Bay Important Bird Area (IBA). The large trees serve as resting and staging roosts for birds such as Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons that venture from high perches to hunt. Skagit Bay is a key stop along the Pacific flyway for hundreds of thousands of migratory waterbirds and is part of the core wintering range for many avian species. Wetlands also support carbon-sequestering functions that benefit CO₂ impacts locally and regionally.

B. Water resources

1. Provides for protection of groundwater resources through aquifer recharge area protection. Groundwater susceptibility is currently mapped as Low, Medium or High susceptibility (as part of the county's CAO).

The susceptibility to groundwater contamination for this site is mapped as moderate susceptibility. Protecting from future development protects the aquifer recharge area.

2. Provides for protection of groundwater resources / seawater intrusion risk (ICC 8.09.099).

This area is identified as an area of medium-high risk for seawater intrusion (Island County Water Resource Management Plan, 2005). Protecting from future development reduces the demand in an area where groundwater resources may be limited.

3. Reduces impact of surface water discharge.

Healthy wetlands improve surface water quality by slowing the surface water flow supporting infiltration which allows for the removal of nutrients. This also slows the surface flow in the watershed moderating the adverse water quality effects of soil erosion or storm water runoff. Clearcutting and development of this steep, forested property could create erosion challenges and have negative impacts on water quality. Due to the significance of this upland water runoff to the estuary, during a 2005 road paving operation, a culvert under the lower portion of Moore Road that diverted water directly to Skagit Bay was removed so that the runoff could again flow into the estuary and improve rearing conditions for juvenile salmonids and forage fish that inhabit the area.